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Robert H. Mundheim

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INAUGURATION OF THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF LAW, LANGUAGE AND COGNITION

INTRODUCTION*

Joan G. Wexler[†]

I am delighted to introduce the inaugural program of the Brooklyn Law School Center for the Study of Law, Language and Cognition. The immediate impetus to our decision to create this Center was the recent addition of Professor Lawrence Solan and Professor Steven Winter to the Brooklyn Law School faculty, both of whom devote a great deal of their scholarship to exploring how advances in the disciplines of psychology and linguistics can contribute to our understanding of important issues affecting the law and the legal system. At the same time, many other members of the faculty were engaged in aspects of this emerging body of learning. Professors Margaret Berger, Neil Cohen, Elizabeth Fajans, Susan Herman, George Johnson, Bailey Kuklin, Gary Minda and Aaron Twerski have all pursued the interaction of the studies of law, language and psychology in their teaching and writing. With this unusual concentration of scholarly interest and excitement in one faculty, it was appropriate that we created at Brooklyn Law School a new center.

One mission of the Center is to bring to the Law School prominent scholars who do important basic research in legally relevant areas of linguistics and psychology. We also hope that

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[†] Dean and Professor of Law, Brooklyn Law School.

the Center will assist the scholars on our faculty in sharing their ideas with others by sponsoring programs that highlight some of the creative ways in which they have put research in these other disciplines to use in analyzing the law.

Before I introduce our inaugural speaker, I want to tell you about the upcoming events that are planned in connection with the Center. In October 1999, the Center will present a program on the cognitive bases of gender bias, featuring Professor Virginia Valian, a professor of psychology at Hunter College and the author of a recent, and highly acclaimed, book on this subject. In the spring of 2000, the Center will host Professor George Lakoff, who teaches linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley, and whose scholarship has influenced the work of a number of members of our faculty. The following fall, the Center will bring legal scholars, psychologists and linguists together for a conference on the jury system. And in the spring of 2001, we will have a conference on concepts and categories in legal thought, timed to correspond with the publication of our own Professor Steven Winter's newest book on that subject.

The speaker this afternoon, who will help us inaugurate the Brooklyn Law School Center for the Study of Law, Language and Cognition, is an eminent cognitive psychologist, Professor Philip N. Johnson-Laird, the Stuart Professor of Psychology at Princeton University. Professor Johnson-Laird was born in England and received his undergraduate degree and his doctoral degree in psychology from University College London. He taught at the University of Sussex and at Cambridge before joining the faculty at Princeton, where he had earlier visited as a member of the Institute of Advanced Study.

Professor Johnson-Laird's distinguished and influential career as a cognitive psychologist has included the authorship, or co-authorship, of many of the definitive works in this area, including *The Psychology of Reasoning* (1972), *Language and Perception* (1988), *Deduction* (1991), *Mental Models* (1983), *The Computer and the Mind* (1988), and *Human and Machine Thinking* (1993), along with many articles on a variety of subjects in this field.

Professor Johnson-Laird's scholarship focuses on language, reasoning, creativity, and the emotions. Through psychological

experimentation, he endeavors to create models of mental processes, and his enormously influential theory of mental models is routinely included in textbooks on cognitive psychology.

Thus, it is a special honor to have Professor Johnson-Laird inaugurate the Brooklyn Law School Center for the Study of Law, Language and Cognition by presenting his paper entitled, "Causation, Mental Models, and the Law."

